

Event opens up doors for farm sales

Capital region host to training for local farmers to sell to institutions

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Members of the local Farm to School Project Planning Council had a chance to compare notes while attending the FINYS (Farm to Institutions NYS) Market Ready Workshop and Mixer held on March 6th, in Troy NY. (l-r) Carolyn Wellington, Wellington's Herbs and Spices (Schoharie), Barbara Moore, School Food Service - Middleburgh CSD, Regina Tillman, Project Director - Schoharie Valley Farm to School/CCE, and Kenyon Parsons, Parsons Vegetable Farm (Sharon Springs). (Courtesy Photo)

TROY, N.Y. — Partnerships developed by American Farmland Trust /Farm to Institution New York State (FINYS) are allowing farmers to learn about the expanding opportunities for selling their locally grown and produced foods to local institutions, as in school districts, hospitals and

daycare centers. One of the first of these opportunities occurring in NYS was on Monday, March 6th with the support of SUNY Adirondack, Capital District Child Care Council, Cornell Cooperative Extension Offices of Saratoga and Schoharie/Otsego Counties, and the Agricultural Stewardship Association. Their combined efforts resulted in a “Market Ready” Workshop being brought to the Capital Region.

Both large and small-scale farmers in the region could find benefits from attending this full day program that was conducted in several venues in Troy NY. It began with the fundamentals of servicing a wholesale market, still a new subject to many farmers. Covered were subjects like establishing a line of communication that benefited all involved, the how-to of pricing for this market along with packaging, invoicing, and quality assurance, presented by Jared Woodcock, Agriculture Coordinator, SUNY Adirondack. CCE Saratoga County’s Jennifer Koval followed with several tips specific to schools.

After the provided lunch, tours began which allowed the points made throughout the morning to be seen within the environments of wholesale and institutional buyers. Starting out with a location within Capital Roots, which also served as meeting host, staff member Will Malcolm, Food Access Manager, serving as a guide to their Food Hub. This was followed by a visit a few blocks away to the Commission on Economic Opportunity (CEO), where the head cook, Michael Barker, and Morgan Storms, Director of Early Childhood Services, spoke of their needs when preparing hundreds of meals every day for their clientele.

The strongest impression from these tours for the farmers, as well as from participating buyers, may have been that these organizations were taking the purchase and preparation of local foods very seriously. Their diligence showed within discussions of what they needed to consider under limiting factors such as client knowledge and experience with using whole, raw foods, or the additional time required to prepare the farm fresh items for a quantity meal production operation that is generally run on a shoestring budget.

The day closed with yet another rewarding option provided to all workshop attendees. Market Ready Workshop participants had also been invited to a Buyer-Seller Mixer at no extra charge, conducted at Revolution Hall in Troy. The Mixer had been scheduled through a separate Baskets to Pallets program, offered through Cornell Small Farms along with other partners, but with a similar focus. Workshop attendees joined with other farmers to make the rounds to various buyer tables, initiating contact and establishing connections to develop for future sales. This included local sellers Kenyon Parsons of Parson’s Vegetable Farm (Sharon Springs) and Carolyn Wellington of Wellington Herbs and Spices (Schoharie), and buyers Barbara Moore and Terry Gillooley of Middleburgh CSD.

“More and more people of various organizations, institutions and vocations are realizing the immense benefits of supporting a local food supply system, for the health of their constituents and their own families, as well as for the economic wellbeing of the community,” says Regina Tillman, a Market Ready workshop partner and Farm to School Educator, CCE Schoharie & Otsego Counties. “We are now at a point in time that requires that finally all of the dots are connected so that small farmers can scale up sufficiently enough to meet the expanding consumer and institutional demands for locally grown, farm fresh foods.”

For more information about Farm to Institution resources and future workshops, contact:

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